I CLAIM:

1. (withdrawn)

2. (amended) A system for selectively moving articles into and out of a number of loading areas, said system having mutually transverse longitudinal and lateral axes defining longitudinal and lateral directions, respectively, said system comprising a carriage movable along variable longitudinal distances in said longitudinal direction, said carriage having full longitudinal movement capability throughout said loading areas and being capable of depositing and retrieving an article at any point in said longitudinal direction, said system further comprising a bogie and carrying said carriage ~~being movable also~~ along a continuous range of variable lateral distances in said lateral direction, said variable lateral distances being determined by an article having any lateral position along said continuous range of lateral distances, wherein said carriage can selectively engage and release the article at any ~~a predetermined~~ lateral position within said variable lateral distances and is capable of moving along said longitudinal direction from a first position located on said bogie allowing said bogie to carry said carriage along said lateral direction, and a second position outboard of said bogie and longitudinally entirely clearing said bogie, said carriage being independently movable along said longitudinal direction relative to said bogie.

3. (original) A system as defined in claim 2, further comprising a movable bogie, said bogie being capable of moving said carriage in said lateral direction.

4. (original) A system according to claim 3, wherein said bogie is guided by at least one rail along said lateral direction.

5. (original) A system according to claim 2, wherein at least one of said carriage and the article is indexed to a predetermined lateral position.

6. (original) A system according to claim 5, wherein said longitudinal and lateral axes define a horizontal plane.

7. (original) A system according to claim 6, wherein said longitudinal and lateral axes are perpendicular.

8. (original) A system according to claim 7, further comprising a conveyor for transporting the articles.

9. (original) A system according to claim 6, further comprising a conveyor for transporting the article, with said conveyor being located in a plane vertically spaced from said horizontal plane defined by said longitudinal and lateral axes of said system.

10. (original) A system according to claim 7, wherein said number of loading areas define longitudinal dimensions of equal value.

11. (original) A system according to claim 8, wherein said conveyor is parallel to said lateral axis.

12. (original) A system according to claim 11, wherein said conveyor is elevated relative to said horizontal plane defined by said longitudinal and lateral axes.

13. (amended) A method for selectively moving articles into and out of a number of loading areas with a system having mutually transverse longitudinal and lateral axes defining longitudinal and lateral directions, respectively, said system comprising a carriage and a bogie capable of carrying said carriage along said lateral direction, said method comprising the steps of moving said carriage along variable longitudinal distances in said longitudinal direction, with said carriage having full longitudinal movement capability throughout said loading areas, depositing or retrieving an article at any point is said longitudinal direction with said carriage, and moving said bogie to carry said carriage along variable lateral distances in said lateral direction when said carriage is not moving in said longitudinal direction, said variable lateral distances being determined by an article having a lateral position, wherein said carriage can selectively engage and release the article at any ~~predetermined~~ lateral ~~positions~~ position within said variable lateral distances and is capable of moving along said longitudinal direction from a first position located on said bogie allowing said bogie to carry said carriage along said lateral direction, and a second position outboard of said bogie and longitudinally entirely clearing said bogie.

14. (cancelled)

15. (cancelled)

16. (withdrawn)

17. (withdrawn)

18. (withdrawn)

19. (withdrawn)

20. (withdrawn)

21. (withdrawn)

22. (withdrawn)

23. (withdrawn)

24. (previous amended) A system as defined in claim 2, wherein said carriage is autonomously movable along variable longitudinal distances in said longitudinal direction, whereby said system is automated.

25. (previously amended) A system as defined in claim 24 further comprising an automated article handling assembly capable of moving the articles towards and away from said automated carriage wherein said automated carriage and said automated article handling assembly have independent movement capability.

26. (original) A system as defined in claim 25, wherein said automated carriage and said automated article handling assembly further have simultaneous movement capability.

27. (original) A system as defined in claim 2, further comprising at least one additional carriage similar to the first-named carriage.

28. (withdrawn)